

Bush Fire Policy



Document Title	NQS2.21 Bush Fire Policy	Version	2a
Date Approved	January 2024	Date for Review	October 2024
Warning - Ensure you are using the latest version of this policy.			
DCC Network/All Organisation Information/DCC Policies/Quality Area 2 – Childrens Health & Safety			

1. Policy Statement

Our service aims to keep all children and educators safe at all times. Therefore, in the instance of a bush fire, the service will act at all times to protect the educators and children in line with recommendations and instructions from relevant emergency authorities.

2. Rationale

Bushfires are an inherent part of Australia's environment. The basic factors that determine whether a bushfire will occur include the presence of fuel, oxygen, and an ignition source. The intensity and speed the bushfire will spread will depend on the current temperature, fuel load (fallen bark, leaf litter, small branches etc.), fuel moisture (Dry fuel will burn quickly, damp or wet fuel may not burn at all), wind speed, and slope angle. This policy outlines the strategies and procedures the service will adhere to in the event of a bush fire, including information about service closure during an emergency evacuation.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the NQS 7.65 Extreme Heat Policy.

3. Definitions

Bush fire prone area – An area of land that can support a bushfire or is likely to be subject to bushfire attack. Bush fire prone maps are prepared by the RFS.

4. Guidelines

a) Bush Fire Plans

Our service will prepare a Bushfire Action Plan should a bushfire affect the service's operations.

The aim of this Bushfire Action Plan is to outline the activities that educators, children, families and visitors to be undertaken in the following circumstances:

- On days of very high, severe, extreme fire ratings including Total Fire Bans
- When there is a fire in the local district.
- When a bushfire is threatening or impacting the site.
- During a period of recovery if a bushfire impacts the service.

River Region Early Education (Mobile) provides service in some bush fire prone areas (due to significant grass areas).

b) Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger and the Mobile service

As outlined above, the Mobile service operates in Bush Fire Prone areas. In rare situations fire danger can reach Extreme and in very rare situations Catastrophic.

Bush Fire Policy

In these situations, the health and safety of children and adults in the Mobile service is at greater risk due to the location of service, non purpose built venues, and distance of travel for educators and for this reason **care will be cancelled. This is only applicable to the Mobile service.**

In the event care is cancelled, fees will not be charged.

5. Procedure

a) Bush Fire Preparedness

Before the Bush Fire danger period (1 October to 31 March) the nominated supervisor will complete the NQS 2.21 A3 Bush Fire preparedness checklist, auditing the following items.

- Ensure the Fire Danger Rating (FDR) is checked daily, available from <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fdr-and-tobans> (NSW)
- Ensure the Fires Near Me app is installed on designated service mobile phones (NSW)
- ensure trees are trimmed to a distance of 2m from buildings.
- ensure any dead branches, leaves and undergrowth are removed from around buildings.
- ensure bark, heavy mulch, wood piles and any other flammable materials close to buildings are removed.
- arrange for any lopping of branches if necessary
- arrange for gutters and roofs to be regularly cleaned and kept free of leaves
- ensure tile and paintwork on buildings is well maintained
- ensure there is well maintained equipment to fight fires (e.g. long hoses with nozzles, buckets, sprinklers, petrol/diesel powered pump)
- prepare an emergency evacuation bag which will be organised and is accessible. The kit will include:

If there is maintenance required, this will be actioned. For mobile venues, the General Manager will write to the Hall committees and follow up with a telephone call. If maintenance has not been completed per policy and also per the Bush Fire preparedness checklist, the venue is may be deemed unsafe to be used.

- A copy of the Bushfire Action Plan
- current emergency contact details for each child
- employee and next of kin contact details
- emergency service telephone numbers
- fully stocked first aid kit
- administration of medication records and medical management plans
- mobile phone with sufficient credit and charger
- drinking water
- fire blanket
- gloves
- portable radio and torches - battery-powered.
- spare batteries
- whistle
- pen and paper
- alcohol based hand sanitiser
- sunscreen
- insect repellent

Bush Fire Policy

- Toilet paper
- nappies/wipes/change mat
- infant bottles and formula

This Kit will be checked quarterly, at the timing of emergency evacuations.

b) Extreme and Catastrophic Fire Danger (Mobile)

1. The nominated supervisor will check the following site <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fdr-and-tobans> (NSW) to check expected fire danger rating. This will be complete by 4pm the day prior to service.
2. If the Fire Danger Rating is forecast to be Extreme or Catastrophic, the General Manager will be contacted by the Mobile service to cancel care for the following day
3. An email and a text message will be sent by the admin staff to all families informing them of the decision to cancel care as directed by the General Manager.

“Mobile childcare and preschool at _____ venue has been cancelled for _____ (day) the _____ (date) for health and safety reasons of the children and educators as the Fire Danger Rating is forecast to be Extreme or Catastrophic tomorrow. Families are asked to make alternative arrangements for care for this day and will NOT BE CHARGED FEES. We apologise for any inconvenience.”

4. The NSW Department of Education will be notified via 1800 619 113.
5. Mobile team members will complete their rostered hours in another service of River Region Early Education OR complete allocated office duties as negotiated between the Nominated Supervisor and the General Manager. This may include learning documentation, filing, study for trainees.

Our educators will also “leave early” rather than a “stay and defend” whenever a bushfire may impact the service. In this instance, the responsible person will contact families and ask children to be collected if safe to do so.

c) Very High, Severe or Extreme Fire Danger Ratings including Total Fire Bans and when Fire is Reported in the Local District (Mobile)

- On days where the Fire Danger Rating is Very High, Severe or Extreme, or when fire is reported in the local district, the service will inform families by posting a warning on the front door stating the Fire Danger Rating. ‘ Today the fire danger rating is.....’.
- Mobile service is cancelled in the event of Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger.
- Efforts will be made to place a sign on the door saying ‘Mobile Service is cancelled in the event of extreme or catastrophic fire danger’.
- Children will be transitioned throughout the day as per our usual practice.
- Any educators who planned to attend off-site training will stay at the service and have their training cancelled/rescheduled.

The nominated supervisor / responsible person will ensure that:

- all gates have access keys and ensure the locks are in working order.
- all outdoor taps are in working order with hoses attached and buckets placed beside each exterior tap
- any outdoor industrial garbage bin is closed at all times.
- all hazards are removed from passages and walkways and nothing is blocking emergency exits.

Bush Fire Policy

- All educators will monitor conditions when outside. Educators will also ensure that no art and craft works, posters etc are hung outside and that garbage bins are emptied throughout the day.
- Educators will ensure the Emergency Evacuation Kit is easily accessible.

d) Additional Steps Where Fire Reported in Local District

In addition to the steps outlined in the previous section of the policy:

- The **nominated supervisor / responsible person** will ensure all preparation activities have been undertaken. They will also ensure there is a current evacuation plan in place that can be implemented after considering any local road closures etc.
- All children's activities outside the building will be cancelled.
- Educators, families and visitors to the service will be encouraged to reverse park their cars.

The nominated supervisor/educators will:

- turn off any gas cylinders
- back up all computer files.
- ensure that whistles are in place beside each evacuation bag so they can be used to notify everyone if a fire starts on site.

Educators will be diligent in ensuring children's personal items are placed in their bags when not in use.

e) Fire Reported in Immediate Vicinity or Directly Impacting the Service

The steps outlined in the previous sections will be followed immediately. In addition:

The Nominated Supervisor will:

- contact and liaise with the emergency services
- implement emergency evacuation procedures if it is safe to do so
- Implement emergency shelter in place procedures if it is not safe to evacuate. In this case the Nominated Supervisor will ensure educators:
 - move all hoses inside building
 - close all doors and windows
 - access the roof space every 10-20 minutes to check for spot fires
 - soak towels and place under external doors
 - block drain pipes and fill gutters with water
 - continually patrol property for spot fires and extinguish
 - remove curtains, move furniture away from windows

The **nominated supervisor will** inform the **approved provider** of the situation and regularly keep them updated.

The **approved provider/nominated supervisor** will inform the regulator about the situation, advising the number of children affected, the educator ratios in place and any issues or injuries that have arisen.

f) Bush Fire "Shelter in Place" Procedure

On notification of a bush fire by the authorised authority, the **Responsible Person** will advise educators and staff to move children indoors to engage in quiet activities until further advice on the danger received. Although unlikely, should a bushfire be likely to impact on the service, the

Bush Fire Policy

lockdown procedure should be followed. The fire service will advise when the immediate danger has passed, however, children, families, educators, staff, students, volunteers and visitors should remain indoors to avoid exposure to smoke and radiant heat. Collection of children from the service will be arranged as soon as possible.

g) Mobile service

The mobile service is at an increased risk as they provide a service in bush fire prone areas. The **approved provider / Nominated Supervisor** will work with the hall committees to ensure regular maintenance is completed to ensure the service is prepared for the bush fire season.

Mobile educators are at an increased risk of getting caught in a fire 'when travelling' to and from the service. It is imperative that the responsible person checks the '*fire near me*' app before leaving the centre / venue to ensure it is safe to travel.

Educators will always carry a charged Mobile phone in the truck when travelling. A UHF radio will also be installed to ensure that should the truck breakdown, they are able to call for help from passing traffic or farmers in the area. The UHF channel will be 8. This will be added onto the River Region Early Education telephone list.

In situations of Very High, or Severe Fire Danger / and or Extreme heat a check-in system will be implemented. Educators will text the designated mobile number (GM / AM) when leaving the venue and the anticipated time of arrival at base. On arrival they will text again to report that they have arrived safely. If the Mobile truck does not arrive within 10 minutes of the expected arrival time, an organisation representative will be sent to retrieve the educators

h) If you are caught in a fire

- Call Triple Zero 000
- Contact
- Park off the road in a clear area away from trees, scrub and tall grass
- Face the front of your car towards the fire
- Stay in the car below the windows to protect yourself from radiant heat
- Turn off the engine and turn on headlights and hazard lights
- Close windows and air vents
- Cover yourself with a woollen blanket
- Drink plenty of water
- Cover your mouth with a damp cloth
- Stay down until the sound of the fire has passed, carefully leave the car (it will be hot)

i) Recovery after the Front has passed.

The nominated supervisor will:

- ensure that no educators, family members, children or visitors leave the service until the situation is considered safe by the emergency services
- at all times work to keep the regulator aware of the situation, including the number of children affected, emergency educators ratios in place, any issues that arose and if possible the impact to the service.

The nominated supervisor or Emergency Response Team made up of nominated educators will

- assess the situation and if necessary make arrangements for the care of children for an extended period of time

Bush Fire Policy

- continue to check the building and surrounds for 2-4 hours after the front has passed
- arrange to have fire fighting equipment, warning system and Bushfire Safety and First Aid Kits checked and readied for use again.

Educators at the service will stay on duty until all children have been collected or relief educators arrive.

Only a qualified educator will administer first aid should the situation arise.

Relevant educators will undertake a debrief of the fire emergency situation and the procedures undertaken. Educators will be requested to review their own roles, responsibilities and preparation before and during the crisis. The policy will be reviewed to ascertain its effectiveness.

If necessary, the approved provider/Nominated Supervisor will arrange for relevant authorities to check the safety of the site.

6. Resources and References

- National Quality Standard
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- The Bushfire Royal Commission Report Vic 2009
- Early Years Learning Framework
- www.mychild.gov.au
- Trikki kids early learning
- Rural Fire Service : <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au>

7. Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Standards

Legislation	
Education and Care Services National Regulation	
168	Policies and procedures in relation to emergency and evacuation
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures
98	Telephone or other communication equipment
National Quality Standards	
2.2.1	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2.2	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
6.2.3	The service builds relationships and engages with its community.
7.1.2	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.
Child Safe Standards	

Early Years Learning Framework Learning Outcomes	
Early Years Learning Framework Principles	
Early Years Learning Framework Practices	

8. Related Documents

Doc #	Attachments
NQS2.21 A1	Bush Fire Survival Plan
NQS2.21 A2	Fire Danger Ratings fact sheet
NQS2.21 A3	Bush Fire Preparedness checklist

Doc #	Intersections with other key documents
NQS2.8	Emergency Management and Evacuation Policy
NQS7.65	Extreme Heat Policy

9. Document Control

Doc #	Doc Title	Version	Approved	Next Review
NQS2.21	Bush Fire Policy		October 2019	October 2021
NQS2.21	Bush Fire Policy	2	October 2021	October 2024
NQS2.21	Bush Fire Policy (minor changes due name change and new policy document format)	2a	January 2024	October 2024